

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*: the first record for Seychelles

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Un Fuligule nyroca *Aythya nyroca* adulte en plumage nuptial a été observé à Police Bay, Mahé, le 26 mai 1998. Cette observation a été acceptée par le Comité d'Homologation des Seychelles comme la première pour les îles.

During 1998, I spent much time working with Gérard Rocamora compiling the first inventory of Important Bird Areas in Seychelles. As a part of our research, we identified potential sites of importance for Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*, an Asian species that, in the Afro-Malagasy region, breeds only in Seychelles. One such site is Police Bay, near the southern tip of Mahé.

On paper, Police Bay was an exciting prospect, possessing one of the largest surviving areas of coastal plateau wetland in Seychelles. Data were lacking because the site had been closed to the public for more than 15 years, due to the establishment of an army base and high security prison. Surprisingly, we obtained permission to visit the site with remarkable ease.

We arrived shortly after daylight on 26 May 1998 and, while walking around the edge of the marsh, we soon located Yellow Bitterns and a couple of additional surprises. The first appeared to be a hybrid duck, which I had seen some months earlier at Roche Caiman Bird Sanctuary. I had sent photographs to Steve Madge who had identified it as a probable Muscovy *Cairina moschata* x Pacific Black Duck *Anas perspicillata*. Next was first one, then two, juvenile Purple Herons *Ardea purpurea*. This vagrant was known from 17 previous records accepted by Seychelles Bird Records Committee. Our sighting was a little surprising, the majority of reports being during October–December.

Gérard and I separated to investigate different areas of the wetland. I climbed a sloping granite glacia overlooking the marsh to survey the widest possible area. From this vantage, I soon re-located the hybrid duck. However, this time it was in the company of another smaller pochard-like duck. After five minutes, Gérard joined me and we viewed the bird with his telescope.

It was a very small, relatively compact duck with a large head and high crown. The plumage was mainly reddish chestnut-brown, the feathers of the head and breast shining in the bright morning sunlight. The flanks were of

similar coloration, lacking sheen, the back blackish. A neat white triangle was obvious on the undertail. The bill was blackish with grey edges, and broadened near the tip. A white iris was obvious in clear contrast to the surrounding plumage. Obliging it flapped its wings at one stage to reveal a broad white wingbar. The bird was relatively active and dived many times, remaining submerged on each occasion for c10 seconds. We identified the bird as a male Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*.

Ferruginous Duck breeds discontinuously from western Europe to western Mongolia, with isolated populations in Libya east to north-east Pakistan. It winters from the Mediterranean (where it is perhaps sedentary) to sub-Saharan Africa, principally north of the Equator, and through the Caspian Sea, Middle East, northern India and at some sites in south-east Asia¹. In East Africa, it is a scarce migrant during December–March².

Details were submitted to the Seychelles Bird Records Committee and the record was accepted by that body as the first for the islands. It is extremely unusual for any vagrant to be recorded in Seychelles at this time of year. Some waders, probably first-year birds, spend the northern summer in Seychelles but, in breeding plumage, any Palearctic species is a rare sight in the archipelago. Researchers looking for Madagascar Pochard *A. innotata* are advised to carefully eliminate vagrant *A. nyroca* when identifying *Aythya* species in this area of the southern Indian Ocean. ♀

References

1. del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A. and Sargatal, J. (eds) 1992. *Handbook of the Birds of the World*. Vol 1. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions.
2. Zimmerman, D.A., Turner, D.A. and Pearson D.J. 1996. *Birds of Kenya and northern Tanzania*. London: A. & C. Black.

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